

3
ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2A

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
4 January 1985

Sources probed at CBS trial

5 By David Zucchini
Inquirer Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Citing interviews, public documents and a naval officer's letters to his wife, CBS producer George Crile sought yesterday to justify allegations made by the network in a 1982 documentary on the Vietnam War.

Crile's lengthy and detailed testimony came as the trial of Gen. William C. Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit against CBS resumed after a two-week holiday recess. Crile, a defendant in the case called to the stand by Westmoreland's attorney, completed two days of cross-examination by CBS attorney David Boies.

Boies led Crile through a recitation of his major sources of information in preparing *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*. The broadcast accused Westmoreland of heading a "conspiracy" to alter and suppress estimates of enemy strength in Vietnam in 1967.

Crile testified that he had interviewed 80 people for the documentary. In addition, he said, about 300 people had previously been interviewed by Samuel Adams, a former CIA analyst hired by CBS as a consultant for the program.

Summarizing some of the interviews for the trial jury, Crile said former military intelligence officers under Westmoreland had confirmed to him what became the main allegations of the documentary. Those allegations included the placing of an arbitrary "ceiling" on the number of enemy troops Westmoreland's intelligence officers were allowed to report, the cutting of entire categories of enemy strength, and the suppression of figures showing a larger enemy.

Boies also questioned Crile about a number of Vietnam-era military cables, government documents, books, newspaper articles and congressional findings. Again and again he posed two questions after Crile had explained his interpretation of various documents during his preparation of the broadcast.

First, he asked whether Crile had been aware of particular material. Over and over, Crile answered, "I was."

Second, he asked whether Crile considered various materials in preparing the broadcast. Repeatedly, Crile replied, "I did."

300 letters

The process was designed to persuade the jury that Crile had assembled a wealth of documentation — public records as well as personal interviews — that was carefully researched and evaluated before the broadcast's allegations were aired.

Among the documents introduced by Boies was a series of 300 letters written in 1968 by Navy Cmdr. James Meacham, an intelligence analyst in Westmoreland's command, to his wife in the United States. The letters said the command engaged in the faking and suppression of estimates of enemy strength.

"You should have seen the antics my people and I had to go through with our computer calculations to make the February enemy strength calculations come out the way the general wanted them to," Meacham wrote in one letter. "We started with the answer and plugged in all sorts of figures until we found a combination the machine could digest."

Referring to a press presentation he had helped prepare, Meacham wrote, "I have never in my life assembled such a pack of truly gargantuan falsehoods. The reporters will think we are putting on a horse-and-dog show when we try to sell them this crap."

Later, Meacham wrote that people in Washington were "beginning to smell a rat" in "this strength business." He added: "Someday it may come out how we have lied about these figures."

In another letter, Meacham lent credence to a central CBS allegation: that Westmoreland's command minimized enemy strength estimates to make it seem that the war was being won, thus leaving U.S. civilian and military leaders unprepared for the scope of the February 1968 Tet offensive by the enemy.

Enemy more formidable

"We shall see if I can make the computers sort out the losses since the Tet offensive began in such a manner as to prove that we are winning the war," he wrote in March 1968. "If I can't, we shall of course jack the figures around until we do show progress."

Meacham added that the enemy "is a good deal more formidable than we have let ourselves believe for these many months."

Portions of an interview Crile conducted with Meacham were shown on the broadcast. But in unused portions, shown to the jury earlier in the 12-week-old trial, Meacham dismissed the significance of the letters and accused Crile of trying to force him to incriminate Westmoreland's command.

Boies, however, reminding Crile that Westmoreland's attorney, Dan Burt, had accused the producer of "making up" material for the documentary, asked Crile if he had "made up" Meacham's letters. Crile smiled and replied, "No, I didn't."

Boies also introduced a 1967 memo notation written by George Allen, then the second-ranking Vietnam analyst for the CIA. The notation criticized a compromise agreement by which the CIA ended a bitter debate over intelligence data with Westmoreland's command by accepting the command's lower estimates of enemy strength.